



AEWA MOP6 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2015

On the second day of AEWA MOP6, delegates addressed several agenda items, including: implementation of the Strategic Plan and the Plan of Action for Africa; national reviews; international reports; the Implementation Review Process; the International Implementation Tasks; and waterbird monitoring. They also discussed proposed amendments to the Agreement and several new and revised International Single Species and Multi-Species Action Plans and Management Plans.

OUTCOMES OF OTHER CONVENTIONS OF RELEVANCE TO AEWA

RAMSAR: Tobias Salathé, Ramsar Secretariat, presented outcomes from COP12 to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of relevance to AEWA, with emphasis on the New Global Strategy for Wetlands 2016-2024. He outlined the importance and work of the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel and emphasized that there is room for further cooperation on Ramsar regional initiatives and flyway conservation. He also outlined the need to link migratory bird habitat conservation with peatland rewetting and restoration, especially in tropical peatlands.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AEWA PLAN OF ACTION FOR AFRICA 2012-2017

Evelyn Moloko, AEWA Secretariat, introduced the report on the implementation of the African Initiative and the Plan of Action for Africa 2012-2017 (AEWA/MOP 6.11). She outlined that despite a lack of sustainable funding, the initiative had been successful in, *inter alia*: providing technical support on the sub-regional level through the Technical Support Unit; creating species action plans covering five priority species; recruiting nine new parties and three prospective parties (Botswana, Angola and the Central African Republic); and supporting projects through the AEWA Small Grants Fund. She outlined a need for the initiative to focus on: implementation; addressing livelihood concerns; improving capacity for flyway conservation; and improving waterbird data.

An MoU was signed by AEWA and three educational institutes in East Africa on increasing awareness of waterbird conservation.

During the ensuing discussion, SENEGAL, MADAGASCAR, CÔTE D'IVOIRE and MAURITANIA highlighted national initiatives. KENYA and SWAZILAND urged parties to continue financial support for the initiative, with GHANA asking parties to investigate innovative funding mechanisms. TANZANIA called for increased collaboration with the Ramsar Convention and MOROCCO for strengthened cooperation within the initiative.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AEWA STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2017

Sergey Dereliev, AEWA Secretariat, introduced the report on progress of implementation of the AEWA Strategic Plan 2009-2017 (AEWA/MOP 6.12), noting that progress toward the Strategic Plan Goal (“to maintain or to restore migratory waterbird species and their populations at a favorable conservation status throughout their flyways”) was described at MOP5 as “very insufficient” and that progress has declined since. He said two targets were reached, on national capacity building (Target 4.3) and awareness raising (Target 5.6), and called for closer attention to targets with tangible conservation results, particularly those four not assessed for MOP6 due to insufficient data. Noting that only 55% of parties submitted national reports, he urged parties to “be more meticulous.”

Dereliev introduced the draft resolution on the extension and revision of the AEWA Strategic Plan and the Plan of Action for Africa (AEWA/MOP6 DR14), and David Stroud (UK), Chair of the AEWA Technical Committee, introduced the draft resolution providing an update on AEWA’s contribution to delivering the Aichi 2020 Biodiversity Targets and AEWA implementation in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (AEWA/MOP DR15).

ANALYSIS OF AEWA NATIONAL REPORTS

Kelly Malsch, UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, shared conclusions from the analysis of national reports for 2012-2014 (AEWA/MOP 6.13). She noted four targets requiring further work: development and implementation of Single Species Action Plans; the phasing out of the use of lead shot; and securing support for, and implementation of, the AEWA Communication Strategy (Targets 1.4, 2.1, 4.1 and 4.2, respectively). Among priority recommendations, she highlighted the need for parties to focus on targets that will help achieve the Strategic Plan Goal, and to improve reporting rates through capacity building.

SOUTH AFRICA and KENYA stressed the barriers parties face in submitting national reports.

INTERNATIONAL REVIEWS

CONSERVATION STATUS: Szabolcs Nagy, Wetlands International, presented the AEWA conservation status report (AEWA/MOP 6.14), noting the crucial role of national monitoring schemes and expert networks. He said: reliable trend estimates only exist for 36% of waterbird populations; data quality is poorest in the Central Asian flyway and the West Asian-East African flyway; overall, 30% of populations are declining and 25% are increasing; and the IUCN Red List Index shows further deterioration. Moving on to “good news,” Nagy said the proportion of waterbird populations in decline has not increased over the past 20 years, noting that AEWA has “managed to hold the tide.” He said “action plans indeed work” and their implementation should be intensified.



NON-NATIVE WATERBIRDS: Malsch presented the report on the status of introduced non-native waterbird species and hybrids (AEWA/MOP 6.15), noting that data availability and reliability remain an issue. She said some non-native waterbird populations have increased substantially, warranting coordinated action. Among recommendations, Malsh highlighted: initiating coordinated actions for priority species; developing risk assessment standards; increasing cooperation between AEWA and the EU on regulations; and aligning AEWA and other reporting obligations.

INTERNATIONAL SINGLE SPECIES AND MULTI-SPECIES ACTION AND MANAGEMENT PLANS: Nina Mikander, AEWA Secretariat, presented the report on the status of preparation and implementation of these action and management plans (AEWA/MOP 6.16), noting that lack of funding has resulted in a limited review. She outlined that the implementation rate was 38% and that the report recommends to: step up implementation; source more funding, human and technical capacity; step up work and coordination of existing international species working and expert groups; and increase efforts to include more range states.

WETLAND INTERNATIONAL emphasized that the lack of implementation shows that “conservation without money is only conversation.” NORWAY proposed a technical working group to increase focus on action plan implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW PROCESS

Sergey Dereliev, AEWA Secretariat, presented the report of the Standing Committee on the AEWA Implementation Review Process (IRP) for the period 2012-2015 (AEWA/MOP 6.17), which summarizes four IRP cases and one “watching brief” featuring adverse or potential adverse effects on migratory waterbirds as a result of human activities in the Syrian Arab Republic, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Iceland and France. He underscored that the IRP process is “hugely restrained” by a lack of funding.

AEWA INTERNATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TASKS

Dereliev introduced the report on progress made in implementing the AEWA International Implementation Tasks (IITs) 2012-2015 (AEWA/MOP 6.18), noting that of 30 IITs listed, 10 were partly or fully implemented and another two will be implemented in the near future. He explained that funding for implementation was limited due to austerity measures in donor countries. He also introduced a draft resolution containing the proposed list of IITs for 2016-2018 (AEWA/MOP6 DR13) and calling for the closer alignment of IITs with the Strategic Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVISION OF THE AEWA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Florian Keil, AEWA Secretariat, reported on the implementation of the AEWA Communication Strategy and presented the new draft Communication Strategy (AEWA/MOP 6.21), which features a more global perspective and confirms AEWA’s relevance to the SDGs and Aichi Biodiversity Targets. He also introduced a draft resolution (AEWA/MOP6 DR10 Rev.1) that, *inter alia*, adopts the new AEWA Communication Strategy.

AMENDMENTS TO THE AGREEMENT

Dereliev presented the relevant document and draft resolution (AEWA/MOP 6.22 and DR1), noting that changes mainly pertained to taxonomy and nomenclature.

WATERBIRD MONITORING

Nagy introduced the relevant document (AEWA/MOP 6.24). He commemorated the start of the International Waterbird Census in 1967, noting that it has expanded into a global citizen science programme promoting waterbird conservation and management. Among its achievements, he named increasing data availability and monitoring capacity across the flyways. Nagy said: the number of populations with status assessments based on monitoring data has increased by 50%, but still amounts to only 36% of AEWA populations; in most countries in Africa, West Asia and Eastern Europe, there is still insufficient capacity and

funding for waterbird monitoring; and funding for international coordination of waterbird monitoring is neither predictable nor sufficient.

Dereliev introduced the draft resolution on strengthening monitoring of waterbirds (AEWA/MOP6 DR3), which, among other things, involves the creation of a Waterbird Monitoring Fund. SOUTH AFRICA suggested that waterbird monitoring strategies be integrated into parties’ National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, as initiated under the Convention on Biological Diversity. SWITZERLAND supported the draft resolution, but the EU preferred allocating money to existing funds and activities.

INTERNATIONAL SINGLE SPECIES AND MULTI-SPECIES ACTION AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

Delegates presented draft International Single Species Action Plans (ISSAPs) for the grey crowned crane, taiga bean goose, long-tailed duck, Eurasian curlew and shoebill (AEWA/MOP 6.25-29), as well as a draft revised ISSAP for the northern bald ibis (AEWA/MOP 6.32) and a draft International Multi-Species Action Plan for the Conservation of Benguela Upwelling System Coastal Seabirds (AEWA/MOP 6.30). They outlined the main threats to the species and the proposed framework of action.

Mikander, AEWA Secretariat, presented the criteria for prioritizing AEWA populations for action and management planning and for retirement of ISSAPs, as well as guidance on the definition of principal range states in action plans (AEWA/MOP 6.33). She also presented a draft resolution on adoption and implementation of action and management plans (AEWA/MOP6 DR8).

CONSERVATION GUIDELINES, GUIDANCE AND DEFINITIONS

Delegates and the Secretariat presented four documents for consideration at MOP6: guidance on measures in national legislation for different populations of the same species, particularly with respect to hunting and trade (AEWA/MOP 6.34); draft guidelines on national legislation for the protection of species of migratory waterbirds and their habitats (AEWA/MOP 6.35); draft revised guidelines on sustainable harvest of migratory waterbirds (AEWA/MOP 6.36); and guidelines for sustainable deployment for renewable energy technologies (AEWA/MOP 6.37).

The Secretariat also introduced draft resolutions on the revision and adoption of conservation guidelines (AEWA/MOP6 DR5) and on the adoption of guidance and definitions in the context of implementation of the AEWA Action Plan (AEWA/MOP6 DR7).

IN THE CORRIDORS

The atmosphere in plenary at MOP6 on Tuesday was best described as a mixture of good cop/bad cop: any positive news about migratory waterbird conservation was countered by more sobering realities. As delegates dove into heavier items on the agenda, they heard what one participant described as “heartening updates” from a variety of African parties about the implementation of the AEWA African Initiative and Plan of Action for Africa.

These encouraging signs of deep engagement with AEWA, however, were tempered by the fact that overall progress toward protecting migratory waterbirds throughout their flyways – the bold, hopeful heart of AEWA’s Strategic Plan – was deemed “very insufficient.” After all, a third of waterbird species are still declining. Since reliable trend estimates remain sparse, and only half of AEWA’s contracting parties submitted national reports before MOP6, an even deeper lack of progress might be hiding under the radar.

This led one delegate to morosely question the meaning of life, as well as AEWA. Then again, the conservation status of waterbirds is improving where concerted conservation measures are taken, where their key sites are protected and their exploitation is well managed. So without the Agreement, who knows how much worse the status of migratory waterbirds might be? “We don’t have a control planet,” another delegate noted, “so all we can do is work harder to protect avian life on this one.”